

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

Howard County Board of Education Primary 2022

Congratulations on your decision to run for the Howard County Board of Education. The People's Voice is a civic/political organization in Howard and Montgomery Counties. We have over 4,000 members in Howard County and sponsor the non-partisan Ethics Ballot. If you would like to seek endorsement please return this Questionnaire to EthicsBallot@Gmail.com by midnight May 24, 2022. Please note that all questionnaires are published on the website, www.EthicsBallot.com. We will be in touch regarding endorsement dates soon after getting the questionnaires back. We pride ourselves in working hard for our endorsed candidates, and look forward to hearing your positions on important County issues. THANK YOU so very much for your time!

Be sure to address all aspects of each question.

Name/District: **Dan Newberger**

Campaign Address: **Friends of Dan Newberger, PO Box 355, Columbia, MD 21045**

Campaign Phone: **(443) 583-3475**

Campaign Email: dan@votewnewberger.com

Educational History:

- **Bachelor of Science (BS) degree, United States Naval Academy**
- **Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree, Harvard Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University)**

Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience

- **Relevant Skills & Experience: Strategic planning, organization design, public-sector budgeting, performance management, program and project management, advanced analytics and modeling.**
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1. Why are you running for this office? Describe how your campaign is viable.

In Howard County, we treasure our schools and recognize that their work is the key to our future. But our schools face big challenges right now. We need strong, compassionate leaders on the Board of Education to help our students recover from the pandemic's effects on student learning, social skills, and mental health. We need a sustained focus on supporting and retaining the talented educators and recruiting and developing talented young educators who will guide our schools into the future. And we need to ensure we are providing top quality services to students receiving special education. I have built my career using tools like strategic planning, performance management, and organization design. I am also committed to the core Howard County values that are fundamental to our school district's success, chief among them a deep belief that every child deserves the opportunities, resources, and support to reach their full potential. I have always felt a strong calling to public service, and I believe that I have the skills, experience, and values necessary to help our district tackle the tough challenges it faces.

Some of the most important values that will inform my actions and decisions as a member of the Board of Education are: (1) the deep conviction that whatever their race, background, or zip code, every child in Howard County deserves a great education that gives them the freedom to learn and pursue their dreams; (2) the belief that public education is the bedrock of American democracy, and that vibrant public schools help our country by providing children the education they need to become empowered citizens, and the skills they need to pursue the jobs and careers they want; (3) the belief that, despite our differences, all of us in Howard County are united by our love for our children and our burning desire to see them succeed in school and in their lives afterwards, and that we can and must come together to build a better future for our children and our community; (4) a commitment to listening to experts and making data-driven decisions grounded in science and research; and (5) the commitment to always act with honesty, integrity, and transparency.

Since declaring my candidacy in February, my campaign has received tremendous support from across the Howard County community. I've received donations from hundreds of Howard County residents, built an energetic army of volunteers, and gained the endorsement of a growing list of community organizations. I am humbled and energized by the support I've received, and am committed to giving everything I have to improve the lives of the students and staff of the Howard County Public School System.

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2. What qualifications do you uniquely bring to hold this office? What experience do you have with the Howard County Board of Education (committees/PTA,etc.)? Have you ever testified? What positions did you take?

Laura and I have two children in HCPSS— a seventh grader at Harpers Choice MS, and a fourth grader at Swansfield ES. I've been active in the community since moving here in 2013, and my volunteer activities have included serving as a PTA officer at Swansfield, as a member of HCPSS's Operating Budget Review Committee, as co-chair of the Living Wage Howard County Coalition, on People Acting Together in Howard's (PATH) Education Action Team, on the Jewish Community Relations Council's Antisemitism Team, on the HCPSS Community Advisory Committee, on the Association of Community Services' Policy Committee, and on the Howard County Selective Service Local Board. I have testified before both the Board of Education and the County Council too many times to count; I will follow up with an accurate count and description of the positions taken.

I grew up outside of Chicago, and attended excellent, diverse public schools, which helped prepare me for the challenges of higher education. I went on to graduate from the US Naval Academy and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

As an active-duty naval officer, I served onboard warships and as a budget requirements officer on the Navy headquarters staff. Since then, I've led teams in corporate America, in federal and local government, and in the nonprofit sector. In all these roles, I've helped complex organizations solve tough problems and accomplish their missions more effectively and efficiently through my expertise in strategic planning, organization design, and performance management.

Making real change happen in a large school district is extremely difficult. Being an effective member of our Board of Education takes more than good ideas and good intentions—it requires the ability to really listen to opposing viewpoints, empathy to understand everyone's perspective, the willingness to find common ground, the flexibility and imagination necessary to develop solutions and compromises and coalitions to achieve shared goals, the humility to admit mistakes and learn from them, the discipline to put in the hard work necessary to truly understand complex issues, and the practicality to set aside the "perfect" in order to get to "better." I believe that I have this temperament and skillset, and I am committed to putting them to work in the service of making our schools every bit as wonderful as our children need and deserve.

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3. Have you signed the No Dark Money, No Developer Money pledge? If NOT how do you eliminate the appearance of conflicts?

I'm running for the Board of Education because I care deeply about ensuring that our schools give every child in Howard County the freedom and opportunity to learn and pursue their dreams. That's who I am, that's why I'm in this race. And I'm committed to conducting my campaign with complete honesty and transparency.

Until the day (hopefully soon!) when Howard County's Citizen's Election Fund is expanded to include Board of Education races, it's an unfortunate fact that running a county-wide campaign like this takes money—and a lot of it. In keeping with my commitment to run a people-powered campaign to represent all Howard County students, families, and educators, I have enacted a strict policy limiting from whom my campaign will accept contributions.

I will always strive to do the right thing, both as a candidate and on the board. Every dime that my campaign receives will be accounted for and reported in accordance with Maryland and Howard County campaign finance laws. As a candidate, I am accountable to you, the voters. As a Naval Academy graduate who truly embraces the importance of personal honor and integrity, I am more comfortable safeguarding my integrity personally. Thus, rather than sign on to anyone else's pledge, I instead made the following pledge:

I pledge that I will only accept campaign contributions (to include both monetary and in-kind donations) in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. I will not accept contributions from any real estate development companies or any other corporate entity, to include any corporation, limited liability company, general partnership, or sole proprietorship.
2. I will not accept contributions from any individual registered as a lobbyist with the government of Howard County.
3. I will not accept contributions from any foundation, think tank, or organization advocating for the privatization of our democratically governed public school systems.
4. I will not accept contributions from any organization or person advocating for, or representing the interests of, the for-profit charter school industry.
5. I will not accept contributions from any organization or person advocating for, or contributing to, efforts to undermine, diminish, or eliminate HCPSS's initiatives to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion.
6. I will not accept contributions from any organization or person advocating for, or contributing to, efforts to undermine, diminish, or eliminate the rights of our LGBTQ+ students and staff.
7. I will not accept contributions from any organization or person advocating for, or contributing to, efforts to undermine, diminish, or eliminate the rights and abilities of the Howard County Education Association and its members to conduct collective bargaining and to advocate on behalf of the educators, students, and families of Howard County.

If anyone has any questions about this, please don't hesitate to reach out, I'm very happy to discuss.

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4. What are your top priorities for 2022? Discuss at least three areas in need of change, under the purview of the Board of Education, and how you would address them.

One of the most important issues HCPSS faces today is ensuring a full recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. So many of our students have experienced academic learning loss, mental health impacts, and delays in social and emotional development. So many of our educators are exhausted and feel alienated from district leadership. As much as we want a swift return to “normal,” it is going to take several years of focused leadership and dedicated resources to ensure a full recovery. To address this, we need to develop comprehensive, tailored, data-driven recovery plans for each individual school in the district to guide their recovery. With input from educators, parents, and community members, and with metrics and timelines to ensure accountability, these plans can be our roadmaps for ensuring every student, educator, and school receives the support and resources they need.

Another critical issue that HCPSS is facing is a looming staffing crisis, both for educators as well as the expert support staff our schools need: psychologists, school counselors, paraeducators, cafeteria workers, even bus drivers. To solve this immediate crisis and to ensure that Howard County’s legacy of wonderful schools is sustained into the future, we must become an employer of choice for educators. This means paying competitive salaries to attract the best talent, and then developing, empowering, and retaining those talented educators by providing the top-tier resources, supports, and professional development they need to develop and hone their craft. This focus on developing, investing in, and sustaining a pipeline of current and future classroom- and school-leaders is absolutely critical to ensuring that HCPSS can provide the best possible education for the children of Howard County today and into the future.

A final important issue that HCPSS faces is making sure that our schools work for every student. We have unquestionably wonderful schools, but too many of our students and families have less than wonderful experiences and outcomes in HCPSS. We must provide every child in Howard County—regardless of their race, ethnicity, zip code, language they speak at home, or disabilities they face—with the resources, support, challenges, and opportunities they need to maximize their potential, overcome the challenges they face, and gain the education and skills needed to graduate and pursue their dreams.

I know the question asked for just three, but I want to add a fourth area that needs to change because it is just so critical to the sustained health of our schools, and that’s the capacity/overcrowding problem. I address redistricting and overcrowding later on in this survey so I won’t go in depth here, but I want to say that students in our schools today are paying dearly for decades of poor stewardship and bad decision-making by the leaders of our county government and school district. We must face these systemic problems head-on and do better for our children, and the generations of students who will follow them.

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5. What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the current Board? How have you demonstrated your ability to work with people who have diverse opinions and party affiliations?

One challenging aspect for anyone serving on any Board of Education is gaining a true understanding of what is really happening in the schools and their classrooms. The Board is removed from the day-to-day life of the district's students and educators, and can find it difficult to access to all of the information, context, and differing perspectives necessary to make decisions. I plan to address this challenge through a concerted effort to meet with educators, administrators, parents, students, and community members as frequently as I can. I believe that the work a Board of Education member does while sitting on the dais is only as good as the time and effort that board member spends out in the schools and in the community.

Throughout my career, in a variety of contexts and environments, I have worked with others to create solutions to difficult problems. As a young naval officer, I led teams of sailors to keep our aging warship mission-ready and prepared for battle. Later in my career, supporting the Chicago Public Schools system as a manager in the local nonprofit sector, I led my staff in designing and implementing a 10 day long, school-based vision clinic that, in partnership with local optometrists, provided free comprehensive eye exams and eyeglasses to over 5,000 students from economically struggling families. As a management consultant specializing in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of complex public organizations, I collaborated with my Department of the Army client to identify ways to transform how the Army manages its military installations, while saving approximately \$3 billion in annual operating costs. And as a member of the Howard County community, I recently helped build and lead the Living Wage Howard County coalition, which brought together community organizations, civil rights groups, labor unions, local Democratic clubs, and religious institutions to successfully advocate for the first-ever minimum wage in our county, an important step towards establishing a true living wage for all Howard County workers. I will bring these years of experience as a creative and collaborative leader to the Board of Education, to help HCPSS create solutions that improve our children's education.

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6. In the recent past, the County has funded far less than the requested HCPSS budget. How would you bridge the gap?

HCPSS desperately needs more funding from the state and county, and the Board of Education needs to be the strongest advocates applying pressure to make this happen. The Board of Education must be a strong and unwavering advocate for HCPSS's needs and concerns to the County Executive and County Council, and to the county's state delegation, particularly during the budget cycle. To make this happen, healthy working relationships between members of the Board of Education and the county's elected officials and their staff are essential to the successful operation of our county's schools. My experience as a community advocate has prepared me to be very effective in this aspect of the Board of Education's responsibilities. As a leader in the Living Wage Howard County coalition, I worked hard with members of the County Council and their staff to increase the county's minimum wage to \$15/hour—including vigorous engagement with council members of both political parties—which culminated in the successful passage of CB82-2021, establishing the first-ever minimum wage in Howard County, which will increase wages for over 40,000 Howard County workers.

As a Board of Education member, I will be able to leverage the trust and relationships I have built as a community advocate to be a relentless advocate for HCPSS. At the same time, however, I am not beholden to any elected official in either party in the county. I am fiercely independent and will be unafraid to hold our elected officials' feet to the fire to get our schools the resources they need.

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7. What HCPSS policies do you believe should be changed regarding protections of marginalized groups?

As a member of the Board of Education, I will be a fierce advocate for ensuring every HCPSS school is an inclusive school: a school where every child is welcome; where they are free to be themselves; where, when they make a mistake, that mistake is an opportunity for learning; where, when they hurt someone, that hurt is an opportunity for restoration. This atmosphere of acceptance and support benefits all students and staff, and is especially critical for those in marginalized communities such as racial, ethnic, religious, and LGBTQ+ communities.

One of the ways we can move toward this vision is by fully funding restorative justice practices in all our schools. I have seen restorative practice in action at Swansfield Elementary School, where my younger child is a student. The power of restorative practice is this – it teaches children to take charge of the growth and care of their community. And when that community suffers a breach, they learn how to heal it. Incidents of bullying, racism, fighting, and intolerance can be an unfortunate part of youth. But restorative practice empowers students and educators to turn these incidents into moments of growing and learning. Every student in every school deserves the opportunity to learn and use these strategies from pre-K through graduation.

We also must ensure that educators can teach the content that they, as professionals, know is appropriate for their students. This includes a curriculum that provides our children with an honest and accurate education that enables them to learn from the mistakes of our past to help create a better future. We also need to guarantee that our children have access to age-appropriate books and media that affirm their curiosity and identity. I believe that decisions around the selection of instructional material, development and implementation of curriculum, and teaching of controversial issues belong in the hands of our educators. HCPSS's current policies provide an appropriate level of oversight, and do not need to be altered. I, like so many parents in Howard County, believe that all children should have the freedom to pursue their dreams, so we must equip every school with the resources to deliver accurate, honest, and quality education that prepares every child in the county for the future, no matter their race, background, or zip code. Children should have the freedom to learn with an education that prepares them for the future. This means we need school libraries full of books that can expand their horizons, books that can help discover who they are, books that they can identify with, and books that can teach them empathy for people with completely different lives than their own.

We also need discipline policies that ensure our schools are places where our students and staff are safe and can focus on the important work of academic and social learning. As stewards of our schools, the Board of Education must ensure that our discipline policies are both fair and effective. Because students cannot learn when they are not in school, we need to end our reliance on exclusionary practices. Because it is simply not just, we must stop the criminalization of students and investigate the root causes of the disproportionate impact of discipline on students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students. By increasing our focus on restorative practices, along with more data-driven oversight to ensure our discipline policies are implemented effectively and fairly, we can ensure that all of the county's children are safe and all of our educators are properly supported.

Finally, we also must provide the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) with the staffing, resources, and authority necessary to help the superintendent and our principals build school climates

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of belonging and cultures of dignity, where all our students and staff feel safe, included, seen, and supported.

8. What criteria should be prioritized in redistricting?

I believe that the only reason we should ever redistrict is to address dire overcrowding and capacity issues, or when circumstances absolutely require it such as when we open up a new school. I think that Policy 6010 is the right framework for how the Board and HCPSS approaches redistricting, especially in that it provides a balance between the three critical factors of Facility Utilization, Community Stability, and Demographic Characteristics of Student Populations. All three of these factors are essential to creating positive educational outcomes in our schools.

The 2019 redistricting process was unnecessarily disruptive and traumatic for the entire Howard County community, and I believe we need to learn from that process and conduct all future redistricting with the utmost transparency and respect, keeping all community members informed throughout the process and listening to their concerns, all while fulfilling the obligations of Policy 6010 in a balanced way.

I am disappointed with what we've seen of the process of redistricting for High School 13 that is currently underway. I appreciate that redistricting is a complex process with many moving pieces. But the plan that the Superintendent recommended to the Board is significantly flawed. In my experience, when consultants deliver suboptimal results like this, it can be traced back to either (1) missteps in how the client (in this case, the Board) scoped and defined the problem to be solved; or (2) mistakes in the methodology that was used; or some combination of the two.

When I testified about this plan to the Board recently, I recommended that they use the authority given to them by Policy 6010 to require the Superintendent for more information and to develop new scenarios, and I pointed out a few areas where I believe mistakes were made, and proposed some solutions.

First, travel distance. The methodology used by the district's consultants results in false precision that misses the forest for the trees, and apparently does not take into account the unique circumstances of High School 13's location just off Route 1. The Route 1 corridor is already one of the area's busiest and most dangerous roads. So busy and dangerous, in fact, that the County and the State Highway Administration conducted an extensive safety evaluation of Route 1 only a few years ago. The Board should ask the Superintendent to create alternate plans which factor in the specific circumstances and traffic safety implications of High School 13's Route 1 location.

Another issue can be seen in how the Feasibility Study used Policy 6010 to evaluate plans. For example, one plan with average school capacity of 104% was graded as blue (more aligned to 6010 principles), while another plan with 105% capacity was red (less aligned). So 105% is bad but 104% is good. Again, this is false precision and it's what happens when the client (the superintendent) hasn't sufficiently defined what a successful outcome should look like. To get better results, the Board needs to more clearly define what a successful outcome for redistricting looks like and be direct and transparent in doing so.

Finally, we need to improve how we consider impact on students. Simply counting and comparing the number of students redistricted neglects to consider the degree of impact, which is disproportionate for students in the northeast corner of the county under the Superintendent's proposal. One way to

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incorporate degree of impact would be to apply the two-dimensional approach used in risk assessment. The first aspect is risk probability (how likely a given thing is to happen) and the second is risk impact (how significant that thing will be). Only after quantifying both probability and impact, and multiplying them together, can you directly compare and prioritize different risks. Applying this same methodology to student impact would be a much more meaningful way to evaluate redistricting possibilities.

I encouraged the Board to really dig into the process and methods behind the plan being recommended to them, and to ask the Superintendent to develop new scenarios which correct the flaws of the recommended plan. Redistricting has too great an impact on the entire Howard County community to get wrong.

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9. What do you believe are the best ways to address overcrowding in schools? What steps would you take as a Board Member to address this concern?

Managing our school overcrowding and capacity problems are some of the toughest challenges the Board of Education faces. Our options are limited by many factors outside the control of the Board, among them: decades of decisions of where to build schools which may (or may not) have made sense at the time but no longer support current growth patterns, Maryland state laws which dictate the criteria for distributing capital funding from the state for new school construction, and Howard County government laws and policies concerning the development of new housing across the county.

For decades, Howard County infrastructure has not kept pace with our growth, particularly in the capacity of HCPSS schools. As a member of the Board of Education, I will advocate for our county government to shift the burden of paying for growth from residents to developers, so that developers pay a fairer share of the indirect costs associated with increasing the county's housing stock. At the same time, I strongly believe that our county government needs to support the smart development of affordable housing in Howard County, particularly so that our dedicated educators and staff who wish to live in the county can afford to do so, as well as the county's first responders. (Too many of our district's educators simply can't afford to live here, and that creates both hardships for the educators in the form of lengthy commutes, and a loss for the community when the people teaching our children can't afford to be our neighbors.)

We simply must do better than has been done in the past. The bottom line for me is that we need to stop the cycle of allowing development to proceed without also ensuring that we have, or are actively building, the necessary infrastructure and schools. We also need to ensure that school capacity considerations are a core part of the long-term planning decisions made by the county. Many of these decisions are beyond the scope of the Board of Education, but as a member of the Board I will advocate relentlessly to the council and state delegation on behalf of solutions to the overcrowding that is so detrimental to our children and our schools.

10. What is your position on HCPSS continuing to provide virtual learning?

It's clear to everyone who was involved—parents, educators, and our children—that the virtual learning we experienced during the pandemic was subpar in almost every aspect. The vast majority of our students simply learn and thrive better in classrooms than they do in virtual situations. (There are of course exceptions, and I don't want to discount the fact that some students did well with, and may have even preferred, virtual learning, but this was the exception and not the rule.)

I believe that technology will continue to play an important role in our post-COVID classrooms, but we need to take full advantage of the opportunity to embrace and utilize devices in a more deliberate and appropriate way that best supports our educators in the classroom. We also need to continually remember that, as a socio-economically diverse district, not every student is able to take full advantage of technology at home due to constraints such as the lack of high-speed internet.

If student laptops are to continue to play a central role in instruction—and here I believe we need to rely on our professional educators to determine how exactly to structure the role technology should play in instruction and learning—we will need to invest in the technology, personnel, and infrastructure needed to maintain our inventory of devices. Our schools' technology teachers and media specialists undertook Herculean efforts to keep our students' Chromebooks in service these past three school years, but we need to establish a more deliberate, centralized, and sustainable system of managing inventory, conducting maintenance and repairs, and replacing laptops when necessary. Additionally, classroom technology and teacher laptops must be regularly refreshed and upgraded to keep up with the demands of digital education.

As far as continuing to provide virtual learning options, I believe that we need to be prepared for the (hopefully unlikely) scenario that future world events require us to go temporarily virtual again, by developing contingency plans for quickly and smoothly transitioning to and from virtual learning. My formative professional years were spent serving as a military officer, and the military plans, prepares, and trains for every contingency. So while I deeply hope that our communities and children never have to go through the trauma and disruption of another pandemic ever again, I also believe it is the responsibility of the Board of Education to ensure that the district has plans in place to appropriately respond should the future need arise.

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11. How should security be handled in schools? What staffing and/or training changes do you believe should occur?

I believe that keeping our students, staff, and schools safe is the number one fundamental responsibility of our Board of Education, and I am committed to putting in place the appropriate resources and policies that will best do so.

Rather than simply asking, "Should we have SROs in our schools or not?" the real question I think we need to start with is, How do we best keep our children and staff safe at school? This leads to the natural follow-on questions of, What exactly are the risks to school safety that we need to mitigate? and, What are the best, most appropriate ways to keep our schools safe from those risks?

For matters of maintaining appropriate everyday order and discipline in schools, I believe that security personnel who are employed and overseen by HCPSS and thoroughly trained in working with children and adolescents, de-escalation, and restorative practices, along with educators and support staff, are the appropriate people to be interacting with the county's children in this context. Safety is too important an issue to not be directly controlled by the district, so I want to see a careful transition to using security staff who are hired by HCPSS, trained by HCPSS, supervised by HCPSS, and (when necessary) can be terminated by HCPSS. It is critical that every adult working in our school brings a child-centered, educator focus to their work. (Similarly, I think we need to seriously explore ways to bring our bus drivers back in-house, since the folks who bus our kids to school play an enormously important role in the safety and wellbeing of our students.)

I want to be very clear here that I DO NOT support immediately pulling SROs out of school and replacing them with nothing. As we saw in the middle schools that lost SROs last year, pulling them out with no prior planning or replacement was extremely detrimental to the safety of the children in those schools. We cannot leave a vacuum in our schools where safety and security are concerned. Instead, I want a careful, deliberate, thoughtful transition from SROs to HCPSS employed security teams.

(I don't want to go too in-depth on this point, but I believe this transition can be done in such a way that will be nearly cost-neutral for the county. I'm happy to discuss this in excruciating detail with anyone, please just reach out!)

For a lot of parents, the driving issue behind wanting SROs in place is the risk of a school shooting. Indeed, this is the nightmare scenario for all of us. Here, I believe we must turn to the experts. The National Threat Assessment Center of the U.S. Secret Service in the Department of Homeland Security is the nation's leading research center studying how to protect schools from violence, run by one of the foremost law enforcement organizations in the world. Their 2019 report, "Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence," which I believe needs to be on the desk of every administrator in HCPSS, makes critical recommendations for protecting against school shootings.

Notably, employing SROs is not one of the U.S. Secret Service's recommendations for protecting against school shootings. Instead, the U.S.S.S. recognizes that preventing shootings is the best approach, and to do so they urge all school districts to employ a comprehensive threat assessment

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model that is intended to identify students of concern, assess their risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and implement intervention strategies to manage that risk before their behavior escalates to the level of eliciting concerns about safety.

The U.S.S.S. recommends complementing this threat assessment process with the physical security measures that are deemed appropriate for schools and their communities. Here, the Secret Service acknowledges, as I believe all parents in Howard County must also acknowledge, that many of our neighbors in our community do not feel that SROs are appropriate, and do not feel that having SROs in school make their children safer. I believe that we must acknowledge this concern, and can do so while still implementing every one of the U.S. Secret Service's recommendations.

As a board member, I will be a relentless advocate for HCPSS to fully embrace, and fully fund, every aspect of the threat assessment model that the U.S. Secret Service recommends in every one of our schools, in order to keep all of our students and staff safe from violence.

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12. Special Education has not been funded to the level deemed necessary by the HCPSS to provide adequate services. What would you do to make necessary improvements to services with limited funding?

Years of chronically underfunded special education in Howard County have resulted in staff shortages and a lack of resources, which have had a dramatic impact on the county's ability to provide necessary special education services. At the same time, our special education students have been especially impacted by school closures, virtual learning, and the pandemic. Their stress translates directly to the educators who support them. We need more special educators, related service providers, and ESOL teachers to support the individualized needs of every Howard County child.

We also need more funding for positions dedicated to casework staff at all levels—school-based as well as in the central office—in order to reduce paperwork for special educators and increase their ability to provide direct support for students. Additionally, we must provide better training and increase pay for our paraeducators and student assistants who work closely with our students with IEPs.

Additionally, I strongly believe that we must end our current practices of seclusion and restraint. It is critical that we explore and implement alternative interventions in our schools in order to avoid the trauma and serious harm that can be caused by outdated crisis management techniques.

Finally, we must explore ways to fundamentally change the adversarial nature of the IEP process. Our current system leaves too many of our parents and special educators alike feeling exhausted and demoralized, and our current “failure model” can be a brutal and dispiriting process for too many students. Instead of what can feel like an institutional focus on achieving the least expensive path to meeting minimum requirements while minimizing risk of legal exposure, our schools need to be partnering with parents of students with IEPs in focusing on how to provide every student with the services they need to be independent and successful. It is not right or just for families to have to spend tens of thousands of dollars to hire advocates and attorneys in order to secure the services their children desperately need. I am interested in exploring options for establishing an HCPSS “Office of Family Advocacy” that lives outside of the Department of Special Education and provides advocates and caseworkers to help families of students with disabilities navigate the IEP process and help secure the services their children need.

Everything I've described above requires strong, sustained commitment from the Board of Education to increase funding for special education. As a member of the Board, I am committed to working with our County Executive, County Council, and state legislative delegation to explore all available options for increasing the amount of funding HCPSS receives from the state and county. The Board of Education does not have the power to increase the amount of funding HCPSS receives, but we must work tirelessly to convince those who do hold that power that we desperately need more funding for our schools.

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13. What will you do to hold the HCPSS accountable for consistent, equitable student outcomes across the County?

Eliminating the opportunity gap remains a critical priority for district, and I am committed to doing whatever it takes to move the needle on helping our most disadvantaged and vulnerable students to be successful in school and beyond. Most school districts struggle with significantly closing the opportunity gap, but research has identified some common characteristics shared by districts which have had success. To join the ranks of these districts which have achieved equitable student success, HCPSS must: enact a widely shared, well-enacted vision that prioritizes learning for every child; invest in continuous leadership from instructionally engaged leaders; enact strategies for hiring, supporting, and retaining a strong, stable educator workforce; develop systems of collaborative professional learning that builds collective instructional capacity; adopt a deliberate, developmental approach to instructional change; embrace curriculum, instruction, and assessment focused on deeper learning for students; use evidence to inform teaching and learning in a process of continuous improvement; invest in systemic supports for students' academic, social, and emotional needs; and aggressively engage families and communities. It is the Board's responsibility to hold HCPSS leadership accountable, and there are few areas as critical for this accountability than in ensuring that, whatever their race, background, or zip code, every child in Howard County attains a great education that gives them the freedom to learn and pursue their dreams.